

## Sexually Transmitted Diseases



### GET TESTED

#### **I have some symptoms . . . do you think I have an STD?**

Unfortunately, it is difficult to diagnose sexually transmitted diseases based on symptoms alone. Many STDs do not show any symptoms. If symptoms are present, they may overlap with symptoms of other STDs or other infections unrelated to sexual activity. The only way to determine if unusual symptoms are from a sexually transmitted disease is to consult with a health care provider. The CDC National STD Hotline can help locate free or low cost clinics around the United States and can be reached at 1-800-227-8922.

#### **How do women know if they have chlamydia?**

Women rarely show any symptoms of chlamydia, which is why testing is so important. Pain or burning during urination may be accompanied by a discharge from the vagina. If symptoms do occur, they should be diagnosed by a health care provider. Testing can be done even if symptoms are not showing. Antibiotic treatment usually cures chlamydia. If a woman is diagnosed, her partner should be treated at the same time so that the infection is not passed back to her after treatment is completed.

If chlamydia is left untreated in women, pelvic inflammatory disease or PID can be a complication. Since women often do not show symptoms, chlamydia can be left untreated for unknown amounts of time. Sometimes the infection moves up into the reproductive tract and causes inflammation and abdominal pain. If the infection is not treated in a timely manner, it could cause sterility. For more information about chlamydia, [click here](#).

#### **I'm still a virgin but I've gone down on my partner before. Could I get a disease that way?**

STDs can be transmitted through oral, anal, or vaginal sex. Even if a person has never had any penetration of the vagina or anus, she or he could still be at risk. Using latex condoms for any mouth to penis contact is recommended. For any mouth to vagina or anus contact, a latex dental dam ( a flat piece of latex that can be placed over the vagina or anus), or regular household plastic wrap, can be used to provide a moisture barrier between the vagina or anus and the partner's mouth.

#### **STDs are curable, right?**

Some STDs are curable and some are not. This is easiest to understand if you divide STDs into two categories: Viral and Bacterial.

#### **VIRAL STDs:**

STDs caused by viruses are not curable. Herpes, HPV/genital warts, and HIV are examples. They can all be treated to control symptoms or help a person live a healthier life. Hepatitis B infection can be prevented if a person gets the vaccine before he or she is exposed to the virus. Unfortunately, there currently aren't any cures for viral infections.

#### **BACTERIAL STDs:**

STDs caused by bacteria are curable, usually with antibiotics. Chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis are examples of bacterial infections. If a person is diagnosed with a curable STD, he or she should inform partners so that they can be tested and treated as well; take all medication as prescribed by the health care provider; and follow up after medication is completed to be sure that

the infection is gone. The CDC National STD Hotline can help locate free or low cost clinics around the United States and can be reached at 1-800-227-8922.

### **How is gonorrhea transmitted?**

Gonorrhea is a bacterial infection that can be transmitted through oral, anal, or vaginal sex with an infected partner. Gonorrhea can be passed even if the tongue or penis doesn't go all the way into the mouth, vagina, or rectum and even if no blood, semen, or vaginal secretions are exchanged. Latex condoms are recommended to help reduce the likelihood of transmission and are most effective if they are used from the very beginning of any contact until the very end. For more information about gonorrhea, [click here](#).

### **What are the symptoms of syphilis?**

Syphilis, like most STDs, may not show symptoms right away. If symptoms do show, they may go unnoticed or be dismissed as unimportant. [Syphilis](#) symptoms follow three basic stages. The primary symptom, called a chancre, is a raised, rubbery lesion that is usually painless. Even without medication, this symptom will usually go away on its own. Secondary syphilis can cause patchy rashes primarily on the hands or soles of the feet. These symptoms can go away without medication as well. Finally, third stage syphilis or tertiary syphilis can cause permanent damage, including vision loss, neurologic dysfunction, heart disease, and death. A blood test can diagnose syphilis even if there are no symptoms present. Syphilis can be cured at any stage; however, if damage has already occurred, it cannot be reversed.

### **Is hepatitis B deadly?**

Sometimes hepatitis B may cause complications that lead to death. Hepatitis B affects people in two ways. Most people have an acute infection, which means that after they contract the virus, their immune system successfully fights it off until they are no longer infectious. Most of these people never show symptoms, and often never know they had hepatitis B. In some cases, however, a person is not able to successfully fight it off. When the body is not able to clear the virus, the person becomes a chronic carrier and may remain infectious for life. Chronic carriers are at risk for cirrhosis of the liver, liver cancer, and death. The good news is that there is a vaccine to prevent people from getting hepatitis B. Check with your health care provider. Currently, this is the only STD that is completely preventable by vaccination. For more information about hepatitis B, [click here](#).

### **How does herpes affect pregnancy?**

Most pregnant women who have herpes have healthy pregnancies and successful vaginal deliveries. The health care provider should be alerted to the possibility of a herpes infection so she or he can keep an eye out for any outbreak that might occur in the birth canal. If an outbreak is present at the time of delivery, a caesarean section may be performed to avoid exposing the infant during delivery. Although complications are rare, the greatest risk is if a woman has her first outbreak while she is pregnant or if an infant is exposed to the virus during delivery. For more information about herpes, [click here](#).

### **So, what's the connection between HIV and other STDs?**

When someone is diagnosed with one STD, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend testing for other STDs as well. The risk behavior that allowed transmission of one STD may have put a person at risk for others. STDs may also make a person more vulnerable to contracting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. Some STDs like herpes or syphilis may cause sores that cause breaks in the skin, creating added places for body fluids to enter these areas. Healthy skin may provide a more protective barrier. For more information on this connection, [click here](#).

### **What is the connection between HPV and genital warts?**

HPV stands for human papillomavirus. It's the virus that causes warts of all kinds, such as those commonly found on the hand. There are over 80 different strains of HPV, and each strain infects a specific type of skin. Certain strains of HPV infect skin in the genital area only. These strains may cause warts in the genital area--or, genital warts. Many people who have HPV don't know it

because the virus often causes no symptoms. Warts are the common symptom caused by HPV infection. Genital warts can be flesh colored, white, or grey and vary in size; they can be flat or raised above the skin in a cauliflower-like formation. Just like warts elsewhere on the body, genital warts are usually benign, which means they aren't likely to cause health complications. Treatment of physical warts includes different measures to remove the symptoms from the surface of the skin. Some treatments include mild acid treatments that can be applied directly to the skin or cryotherapy (freezing with liquid nitrogen) which can be performed by a health care provider. Some patients may choose not to have the growths removed. Decisions about treatment should be made with a health care provider. Once symptoms are removed, transmission from the skin may still be possible. Warts may also re-grow. Some strains of HPV primarily infect the cervix and usually do not cause warts. These same strains have been strongly associated with cervical dysplasia and cervical cancer. Regular pap smears play an important role in detecting cell changes related to HPV and in providing early treatment. HPV does not always cause cervical cancer, but it is an added risk factor for women. Treatment of the cervix includes either mild acid applications or cryotherapy. The goal of treatment is to remove the abnormal cells. Frequent pap smears are important in monitoring the cell growth after treatment. HPV is transmitted during sexual contact when infected genital skin rubs against uninfected genital skin. HPV is not passed through body fluids, and getting HPV in the mouth through oral sex is unlikely. Preventing transmission requires barrier protection. Latex condoms or female condoms will protect the skin that they fully cover. It is important to know that genital warts can infect skin outside of the areas that would be covered by a condom. Abstaining from genital skin to genital skin contact is the only way to ensure protection from the virus. For more information on HPV / Genital Warts, [click here](#).

### **How do you prevent STDs?**

Not having sex is the only way to completely prevent contracting a sexually transmitted disease. It is important to note that passing STDs does not require penetration of the mouth, vagina, or anus by the penis or tongue. Simple genital to genital skin rubbing is sometimes enough to allow viruses or bacteria to be passed. Knowing how to protect yourself most effectively is important. Latex condoms are recommended for oral, anal, or vaginal sex. They can be purchased in most drug stores or supermarkets. Make sure the package says they are latex. You can purchase condoms that are already lubricated and you can buy water-based lubricants separately in the drug store. Use latex condoms only with water-based products. Lubricants that are oil-based like petroleum jelly or hand lotion weaken latex, making it more likely to break and decreasing its protective value. For vaginal sex, the female condom is another prevention option. It is a soft pouch made of polyurethane that a woman inserts in the vagina before sex. Like male latex condoms, the female condom should be used only once and then thrown away. For oral sex, latex dental dams (available in most adult book stores or medical supply stores) regular household plastic wrap, or unlubricated latex condoms can all be used as moisture barriers between the mouth and a partner's vagina, anus, or penis. STDs such as HIV and hepatitis B that are transmitted through body fluid exchange can be passed by sharing intravenous drug needles with an infected person. If you are an IV drug user, do not share needles. Learn and practice proper needle cleaning procedures that reduce the risk of transmission.

### **For additional information, contact:**

Idaho Department of Health and Welfare  
**STD/AIDS PROGRAM**  
450 W. State Street  
P.O. Box 83720  
Boise, ID 83720-0036  
Phone: 208-334-6527  
FAX: 208-332-7346